

The Turning Points of Pentecost (Part 1) – Acts 2:1-13

We're back to the book of Acts this weekend, working our way through it under the theme of *Compelled*. B/c that's what people *were* in the book of Acts.

From the apostles, to the disciples, to the church – they were compelled. Compelled by the Spirit, compelled by the message, and compelled by the truth.

And *my* hope, my prayer, is that we will be the same. Compelled to pray, compelled to share, compelled to love, and compelled to serve.

And having covered chapter 1, we're going to launch into chapter 2 this weekend. Acts 2.

And while you're turning there, I'd like to show you a little video. It's an *overview* of

Acts, that I hope will jog your memory and refresh your thinking . . .

After being away from it for a few weeks. Take a look. About 2½ minutes.

(Acts 1 – The Bible Project)

➤ That's where we've been, and that's where we're going. Starting with v1-4.

[1] *When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.* [They, referring to the believers. About 120 as we saw in 1:15.]

[2] *And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.* [3] *And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.* [4] *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

➤ I'm sure you would agree that certain events in our lives are pivotal. Turning points. Sometimes big events, like weddings, and births, and new jobs; and other times little ones. Events that seem inconsequential in the moment.

Like the conversation I had as a 17 year old, with a couple in the lobby of my church.

I was trying to figure out where to go to college and they asked if I'd heard of Wheaton.

I hadn't, but my interest was piqued enough, so that when I went to school the next day,

I asked my basketball coach if he would call the coach at Wheaton . . .

And the next thing I knew I was visiting the campus and making plans to attend.

It was a turning point, that conversation. As were so many of the things that followed.

From marrying Becky, to my first job, to where we lived.

➤ And that's exactly what we find here in Acts 2. A pivotal event, on which everything else in the book depends. A turning point, on which everything hinges. Changes.

In fact, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that it's *the* turning point in the history of the *church*. Something that continues to reverberate down through the centuries . . .

And affect us even now. It's that big.

And it all started, v1, *when the day of Pentecost arrived*. That was the time. The event. A seemingly inconsequential day among all the other days.

And within it, we find 5 major turning points.

2 of which we'll cover this week, and the others in subsequent weeks. Starting with this:

1. At Pentecost, the gospel became central (v1)

That's the first turning point. It's not *explicit* here, but if you know what they knew then, it's definitely implied.

That the baptism of the Spirit, the timing of his advent on the occasion of Pentecost, was intended to convey that the gospel is now *central* in God's work of redemption.

And just to be clear, when I say the *gospel*, I'm referring to the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf.

And all that it means for life to the full and life forever. It became central at Pentecost.

➤ But to see it, you first have to understand what Pentecost *was*.

So let me give it to you in a sentence, and then break it down in order to connect the dots. Here it is:

Pentecost was a festival of worship 50 days after Passover, where they dedicated the firstfruits of their harvest to the Lord, commemorated the giving of the Law, and re-dedicated themselves to the Covenant.

That's it in a nutshell. With 5 parts.

1. Pentecost was a festival of worship.

In fact, it was 1 of *three* major festivals in the life of Old Testament believers. All for the purpose of celebration and worship. (Lev 23:15-21)

The other 2 were Passover and Tabernacles.

Passover, commemorating the Israelite's release from Egyptian bondage. Remember the lamb's blood on the doorposts? And the crucifixion of Jesus *coinciding* w/ Passover? Meanwhile, Tabernacles, in the Fall of the year, marked God's protection and redemption in their wanderings. Their desert wanderings.

Passover and Tabernacles were the bookends, with Pentecost in between. Celebrating God's provision. His provision of food. It was a festival of worship.

2. Pentecost was observed exactly **50 days after Passover**.

In fact, that's what the word *Pentecost* means: 50, or fiftieth. (Lev 23:15-16)

3. Pentecost was a time **where they dedicated the firstfruits of their harvest to the Lord**. (Nu 28:26)

Just like we tithe off the top of our *income*, from the *first* of what we make, they too withheld the first of their wheat harvest. And gave it to the Lord at the temple.

So Pentecost was a dedication and presentation of firstfruits.

4. It **commemorated the giving of the Law** at Mt Sinai. (Ex 19:1)

Here again, this wasn't an *explicit* purpose given in Scripture, but an *implied* one.

B/c the Israelites arrived at Mt Sinai after escaping from Egypt, 44 days after Passover.

And shortly thereafter, they received the Law. From God.

Referring to the instructions by which God led them and guided them, to live right and worship him.

So the Israelites came to associate Pentecost *with* the Law, b/c it coincided so closely.

5. Pentecost was a time when God's people **re-dedicated themselves to the Covenant**.

The *Old* Covenant. *Contained* in the Law.

His covenant, or promise, to keep them as his treasured possession, if they kept and obeyed his commands.

And over the years, Pentecost became a time to renew that obedience. A well-known part of Jewish tradition. **(Summary)**

So putting it all together – Pentecost was a festival of worship 50 days after Passover, where they dedicated the firstfruits of their harvest to the Lord . . .
Commemorated the giving of the Law, and re-dedicated themselves to the Covenant. Which is important, b/c seeing what it *was*, is crucial to seeing what it *is*. Crucial to seeing the turning point.*****
That just like God gave new meaning to *Passover* when he sent *Jesus*, he was now giving new meaning to *Pentecost* by sending his *Spirit*.

IOW the gospel became central . . .

- **Because the Law was giving way to the Spirit.**

The very Spirit *promised* in the gospel. Like when Jesus said in John 16:7 – *If I go, I will send him to you*. Referring to the Holy Spirit.

The one who gives us power to live God's way and be his witnesses. (Acts 1:8)

It's part of the good news Jesus came to proclaim. *He's* part of it. The Holy Spirit.

And the shift, the transition from the Law *to* the gospel, was finalized at Pentecost.

So that no longer was the *Law* God's primary means of leading and guiding his people, but his *Spirit*.

2nd, the gospel became central . . .

- **Because the Old Covenant was giving way to the New.**

Far from a re-dedication to the *Old* Covenant, something God-fearing Jews had been doing for *centuries* at Pentecost . . .

The events in these verses, *this* Pentecost, was confirmation of the *New* Covenant.

God's promise to save us from our sins through faith in Jesus, and give us eternal life starting right now.

That's the *New* Covenant. Inaugurated when Jesus died and rose again; and empowered, when he sent his Spirit. At Pentecost.

It would be like walking into church thinking same old, same old; and walking out thinking something completely new. Completely different.

Or driving into a car dealership with a jalopy, and driving out with a gem.

With the *Spirit's* arrival, the Old Covenant gave way to the New.

And then 3rd, the gospel became central at Pentecost . . .

- **Because food was giving way to people.**

No longer was *grain* the order of the day, but souls. People who believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus on their behalf.

They were now the focus of God's harvest. Not wheat.

And as such, they were the *firstfruits*. The first to be brought under the personal, abiding influence of God's Spirit, in the New Covenant.

The firstfruits of food gave way to the firstfruits of people. (**Summary**)

And the gospel became *central*. Central in God's kingdom, central in God's people, and central in our hearts.

➤ The question is, is it central for *you*? In *your* heart. In *your* life? Is it?

Is the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection on your behalf, and all that it means for life to the full and life forever, *central* in your mind and heart?

Is it the most important truth in the world to you, around which everything else revolves? Or is it on the periphery, revolving around other things?

Like your work. Or your money. Your marriage. Your kids. Your soapbox.

Is the gospel *central* for you?

If not, you're missing out. And missing the point.

B/c Pentecost wasn't just intended for them, it was intended for us.

That we would experience our *own* turning point.

That we would forsake *our* old ways, and give way to God's. Completely.

That we would be the firstfruits in *our* family. *Our* circle of friends. *Our* co-workers.

That's the *first* turning point we find here. And I hope you've had it.

And if you haven't, I pray you will.

Here's the second:

- 2. **At Pentecost, God's presence became palpable (v2-3)**

As in so intense, so obvious, so profound, as to be almost tangible. Touchable.

That's the idea of palpable. And that's what God's presence *was* at Pentecost.

Not that it wasn't palpable before. Certainly Jesus, God in the flesh, brought his presence to bear in a *very* tangible way.

And God the Father in the Old Testament. When he revealed himself to the *Israelites*.

It wasn't like he was *absent* leading up to this, but this was different.

➤ This was accompanied by *sound*. V2. *Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.*
If Luke had been writing in our day, I wonder if he would have described it as the sound of a freight train. Like people do when describing tornados, or hurricanes.
Whatever the case, it filled the house. It overwhelmed them.

And then there were the tongues like *fire*. Something that looked like the shimmering flame rising from burning wood. V3.

Divided tongues as of fire appeared to them [they were visible] *and rested on each one of them*. Talk about different. And palpable. It doesn't *get* much more intense.

And don't miss the speech, in v4. *As the Spirit gave them utterance* it says.

And was understood in a variety of *languages*, like it says in v6. That too was different. Especially so, b/c it was spoken by Galileans. Common folk. Even considered country hicks. Who were unable to speak their *own* language very well.

It was palpable. All of it.

➤ And though *different* than what they were accustomed to, what you need to know, is that every single one of these manifestations, was indicative of God's *presence*.
Mainly, b/c they were *signs* of such, in the Old Testament.

- Like the sound of **wind** in v2. Not that it was *literally* wind, but that the sound was *associated* with wind. *A mighty rushing wind*.

And devout Jews that they were, they would have associated that with God's very presence. Why?

B/c the prophet *Ezekiel* did. When he recorded his vision of the valley of dry bones. Representing God's people, who were dead and lifeless.

It's found in **Ez 37:5-6**. Where overlooking the valley of bones, in his vision, he says . . .
Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you [which is the same word for spirit by the way], and you shall live . . . [6] and you shall know that I am the LORD."

Then in **v9**, God says this – *Come from the four winds, O breath [O Spirit], and breathe on these slain [these dead ones], that they may live."*
Just like Jesus did with the apostles after his resurrection. *He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* A little pre-cursor to Pentecost. (Jn 20:22)
Connecting breath/wind, with the Spirit.

And then God concludes in **Ez 37:14** by saying – *I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live . . . I have spoken, and I will do it.*

God's presence was palpable at Pentecost, b/c the *mighty rushing wind* in Acts 2, was indicative of his Spirit. The very thing *Ezekiel* recorded.*****
You couldn't miss it. And can't now, now that you know.
Wind, sound or otherwise, was indicative of God's presence.

- And so was **fire**. *Divided tongues as of fire* it says (3). That too was indicated God was near. B/c not only did John the *Baptist* say that Jesus would baptize us . . .
With the Holy Spirit and fire, Lk 3:16; but fire had *long* been associated with God's presence.

Think burning bush, Ex 3. When God appeared to Moses.
Or the *pillar* of fire that led the Israelites. It says in Ex 13:21 – *The Lord went before them . . . by night in a pillar of fire*. The Lord did. He was present.
And don't forget the fire on Mt. Sinai, when God gave Moses the Law.
Ex 24 says that *the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain* (Ex 24:17).
So fire was a *common* manifestation of God's presence. Palpable to the core.

- And finally, there was the **speech**. It too was associated with God's presence in the OT. Like when Moses gathered the 70 elders in the Sinai desert. Found in **Nu 11:25**.
Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him [to Moses], and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders.
Sounds a lot like Pentecost, doesn't it?

And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. (25b)
They declared God's work and God's truth. Just like those at Pentecost. **Acts 2:11**. *We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God*. They too prophesied. But [in Moses' day, Numbers 11] *they did not continue doing it*. It was temporary in OT times.
But there's no denying that prophetic speech and God's presence went hand in hand. Especially in leaders. They would have known that. And connected the dots.

➤ What's more, they were *expecting* it. True. In fact, they were expecting an even *greater* outpouring of prophetic speech. B/c that's what Moses said.

On the heels of the 70 *elders* prophesying in the Spirit in Numbers 11, two other guys did so as well. In the camp. At the same time. (**Nu 11:28-29**)
And upon hearing about it, Joshua said to Moses . . .
"My lord Moses, stop them." [29] *But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? [IOW do you want to reserve this only for me and the leaders?]*
Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" All of them. Leaders *and* common folk.

So God's people not only associated his *presence* with prophetic speech, but they *expected* an outpouring of prophetic speech when his Spirit showed up.
Making his presence all the *more* palpable at Pentecost. All the *more* noticeable.

Why? Why 3 different manifestations, so well-known and so obvious?
B/c something new was going on, and God didn't want them to miss it. (**Summary**)
And the same is true today.

- Don't miss the palpable presence of God. In the works he *did*, or the works he's *doing*.
Don't miss it. In the *lives* he changed, or the lives he's *changing*.
In the way he led, or the way he's leading. Don't miss it.
In the events he orchestrates, or the events he uses in your life.

His presence was palpable then, and it's still palpable now. Obvious now. Profound now.
From our worship to our fellowship. Our service to our sacrifice. Our giving to our prayers. God's in it. God's manifesting himself. Over and over and over again.
And the worst thing you can do, is miss it. And miss out.

Open the eyes of your heart. *Sensitize* your soul with his Word. *Forsake* your sin.
And take notice. (**Summary**)
B/c the turning points that began at Pentecost, continue to today.
With the gospel becoming central, and God's presence palpable, in us.

Pray – Lord, give us eyes to see and ears to hear. And forgive us for not making the gospel
central. We praise you for breathing life into our dry bones. We praise you for calling us
out of our graves. And we praise you for the glorious day that's ours b/c of it.